

GENIUS IN THE FIELDS

THE CROP CIRCLES OF 2003

An unusually warm summer in the UK shortened this year's crop circle season, but exciting new themes still emerged and formations were seen in much greater numbers in Europe as well as the USA.

by Andy Thomas © 2003

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Last year had been a renaissance time for crop circles as far as the public was concerned, largely due to the impact of the Hollywood blockbuster film, *Signs*, which ensured that the phenomenon was plastered across our newspapers and television screens more than ever before. As a result, there were more minds focused towards the fields this season than in recent years. However, despite high expectations, 2003 was much quieter than anticipated, in the UK at least, where eyes are traditionally cast to catch the most prolific and spectacular designs.

The very hot English summer encouraged the crops in the fields to ripen early this year, and the combines stripped the canvas away so quickly that by mid-August there were virtually no fields left standing. This shaved almost two to three weeks off the usual length of an average UK crop circle season (which can sometimes stretch into September), leaving researchers and enthusiasts feeling rather bereft. General opinion tended towards the view that the season lacked some of the truly stunning masterpieces we have come to expect, and didn't deliver a "grand finale" as such. That said, the year still produced a variety of spectacular and intriguing designs that 10 years ago would have shocked and been marvelled at; so perhaps we have become rather too used to genius at work in our fields.

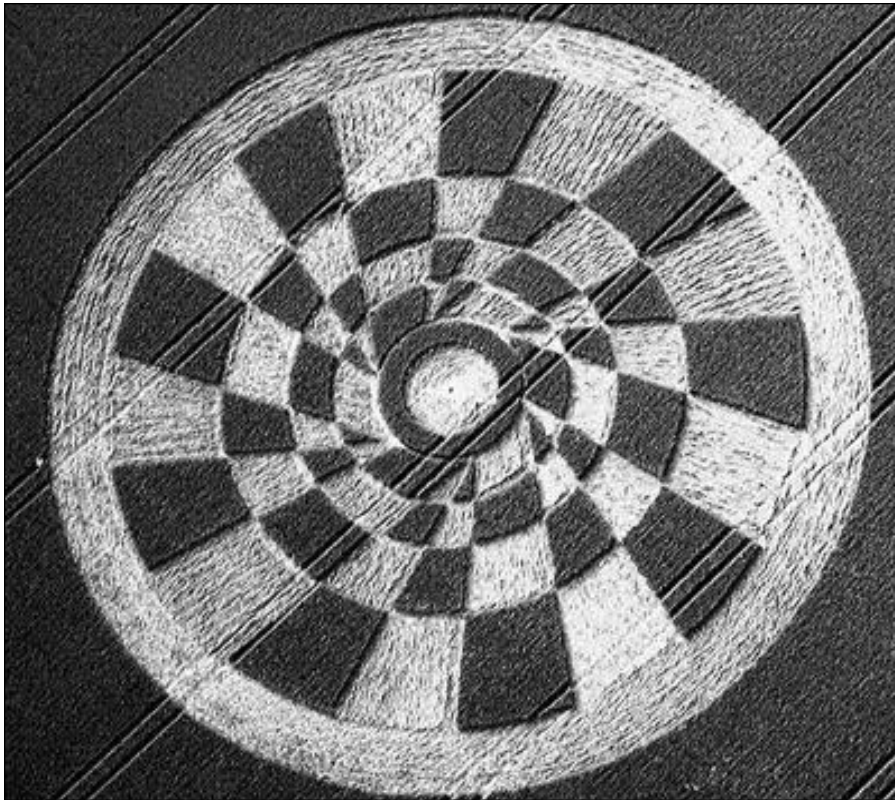
Research into biological effects in circle-affected crop continues to show anomalous effects in many cases—effects which are yet to be reproduced by hoaxers. The human demonstrations continue to fall short of the standards seen in so many of the masterpieces that have appeared more mysteriously. The quality of the lay in these formations is still unsurpassed by the claimants' work, and the long hours taken to create the human efforts challenges the idea that all crop formations are made in this way. We still have an extraordinary mystery before us.

So what were the highlights of 2003? The year started on exactly the same date as the previous season, when a single circle in oilseed rape arrived at Ringmer in Sussex around 12th April, though it was not the first to be reported. That honour went to Privett in Hampshire, the day after: a curious, ringed figure-of-eight with a broken flow, looking a little like a metal puzzle.

The first truly stunning formation of the season took the ring-of-rope idea started the year before at Alton Priors in Wiltshire and developed it further at Windmill Hill on 7th June. These designs are virtually impossible to draw on paper without a fine grid of criss-crossing lines over them, yet there is no evidence that such a technique was used in the field. Similar, if less well executed, geometrical themes would be used towards the end of the season at Alton Barnes and again at Alton Priors.

On 15th June, a beautiful six-armed emblem of radiating crescents arrived at Ogbourne St George, and became the latest in a long line of formations to have strange balls of light videoed hovering over and around them, taken this year by Stuart Dyke of the Crop Circle Connector website. These small white balls of light are seen every year in association with crop circles and continue to mystify and amaze, though their origins remain unknown.

Over the next few weeks, some intriguing themes and geometrical delights were produced, but they were not all confined to the usual Wiltshire heartlands. On 21st June, much further north at Thornborough in North Yorkshire, a very complex emblem of clustered half-rings in a floral design appeared right next to the ancient site of Thornborough Henge. Many researchers saw this as a protest from the circlemaking sources, as the Henge is currently threatened with partial destruction due to quarrying and a campaign is



Tan Hill, near Stanton St Bernard, Wiltshire. Reported 24th June.
Image: Nick Nicholson and the Crop Circle Connector © 2003

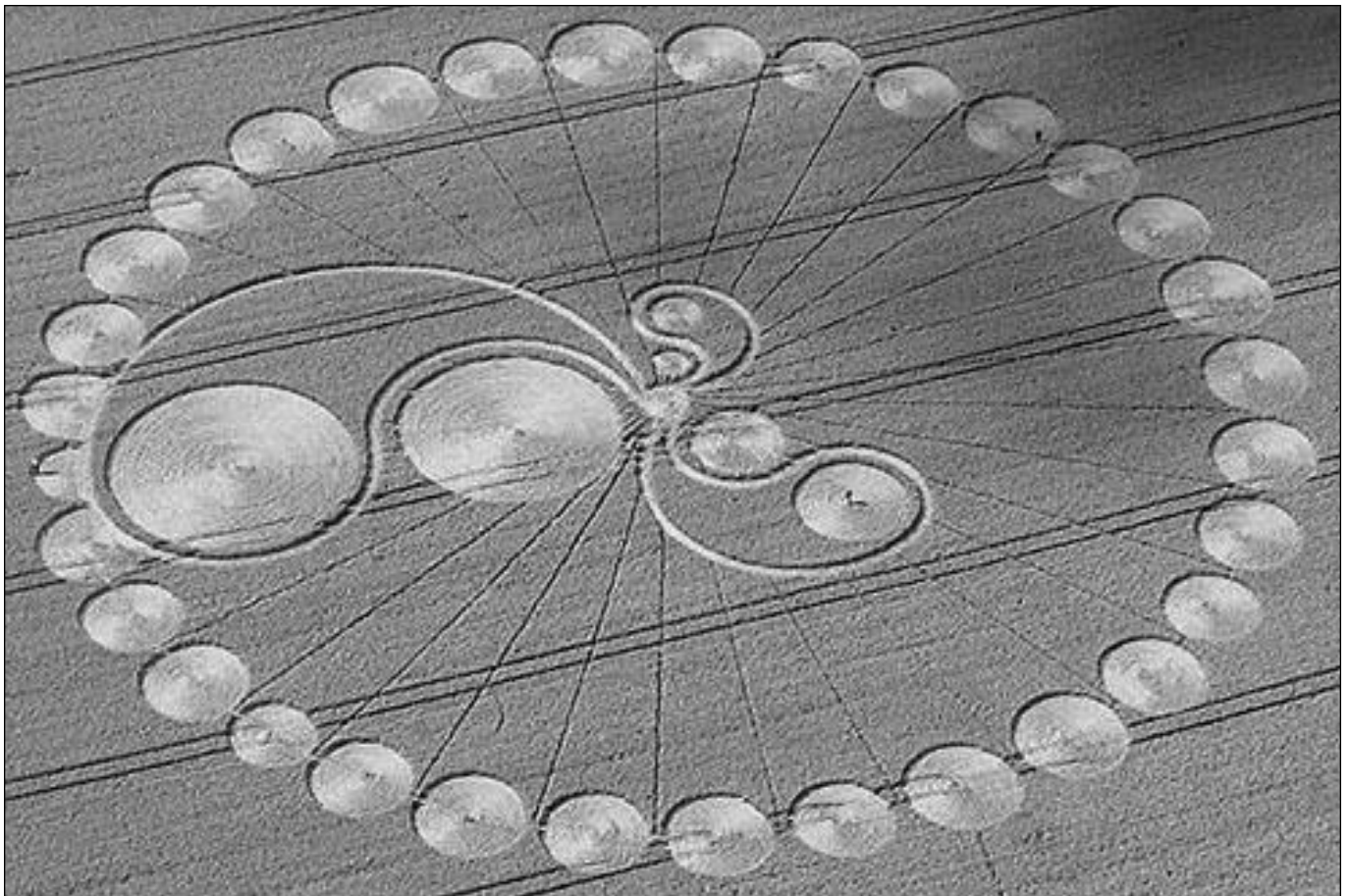
currently underway to stop this.

Other areas around the country also produced excellent works, including Sussex, with two very fine designs at Patcham and Lewes, amongst other formations, and at Sharpnose in Bedfordshire, where a stunning pentacle with a ring of radiating lines impressed with its clean-cut precision.

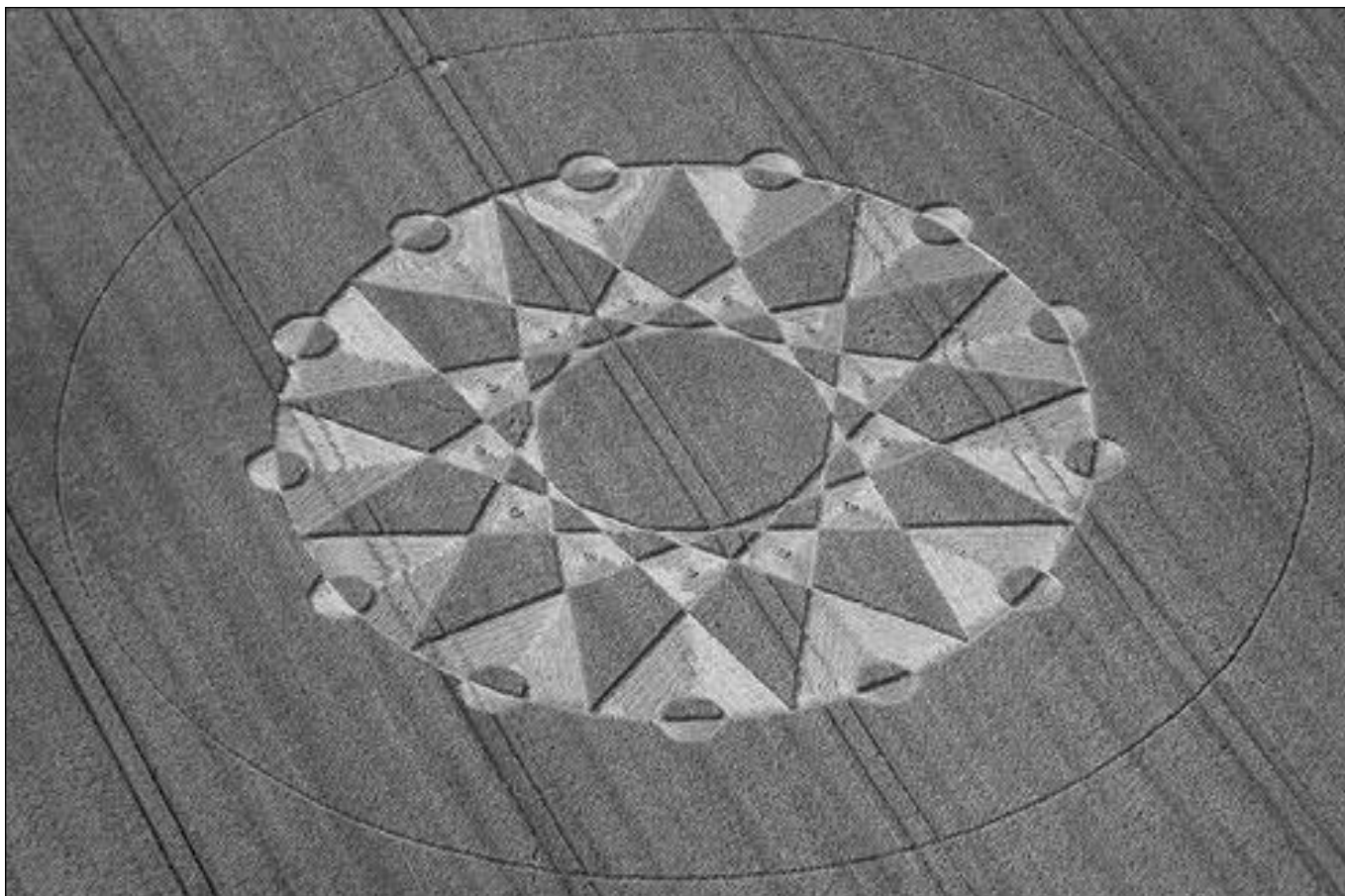
Ancient sites always seem to attract crop circles. Another appearance which made a firm connection with our prehistoric heritage was the so-called "Celtic shield" design, a remarkably detailed circle containing over 400 tiny rings in a concentric configuration. It arrived at North Down, between Bishops Cannings and Beckhampton, Wiltshire, on 5th July.

It was placed perfectly in line with a series of four burial mounds spread out in a linear fashion, and was directly on the spot where another mound, now removed, had been.

Some new visual themes developed in 2003, sometimes playing with new types of design, such as the abstract pop-art pattern that appeared at Woodborough Hill on 14th July and the beautiful "swallows" emblem that turned up at Alton Barnes on 4th August, which resembled flying birds trailing necklaces of diminishing circles.



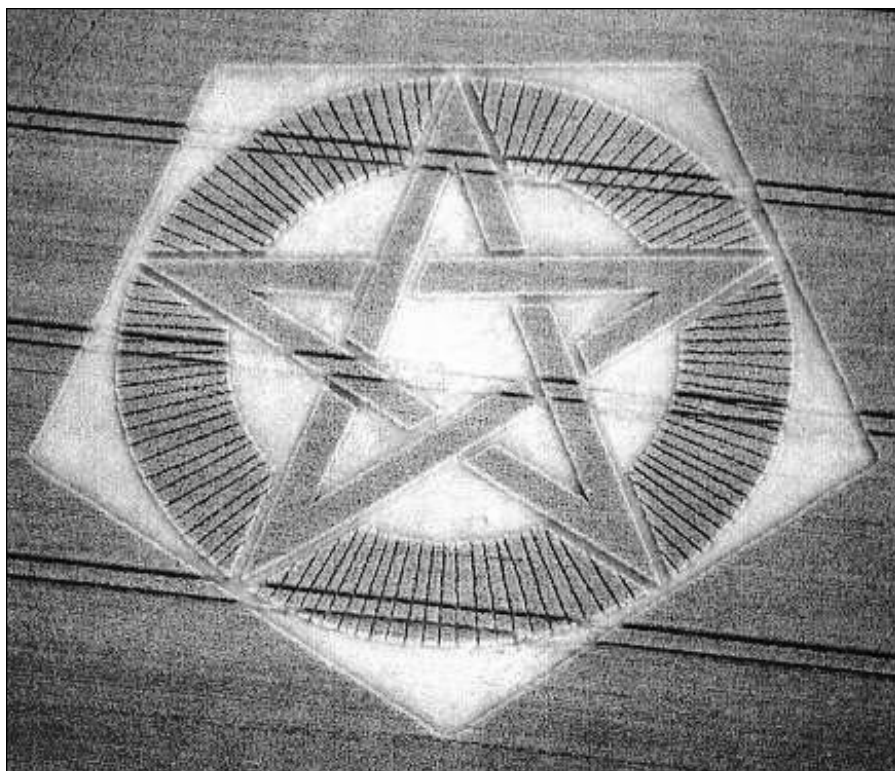
Hackpen Hill, near Winterbourne Bassett, Wiltshire. Reported 20th July.
Image: Nick Nicholson and the Crop Circle Connector © 2003



West Stowell, near Huish, Wiltshire. Reported 20th July.
Image: Nick Nicholson and the Crop Circle Connector © 2003

The number-play utilised in the geometry of some formations also expanded. For the first time, at West Stowell, Wiltshire, on 20th July, a complex pattern of radiating diamonds used 13-fold geometry as its main feature. Though the number 13 had been present implicitly in at least one formation before this, it had never been used overtly as part of the physical pattern. Researcher Michael Glickman has long predicted the clear usage of the number 13—the number of transformation—in the fields, and he believes it marks an important step in the continuing mathematical lesson the crop circles are giving us.

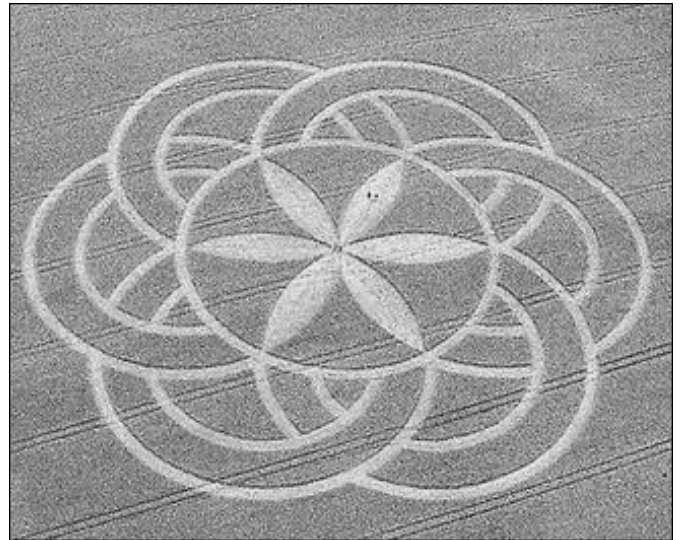
By the middle of August, there were high expectations that something of great importance would appear around the anniversary of the "face and message" formation of 2001 and the "alien and disc" of 2002, both of which appeared around 14th August and had encoded pictorial and binary information in a unique and highly controversial way. Some researchers even staked out the fields to await the arrival of the next instalment—but it didn't come, and hadn't arrived at the time of writing. With most fields cut down by the middle of August, it was left to the very large



Sharpenhoe, near Barton Le Clay, Bedfordshire. Reported 29th June.
Image: Russell Stannard © 2003



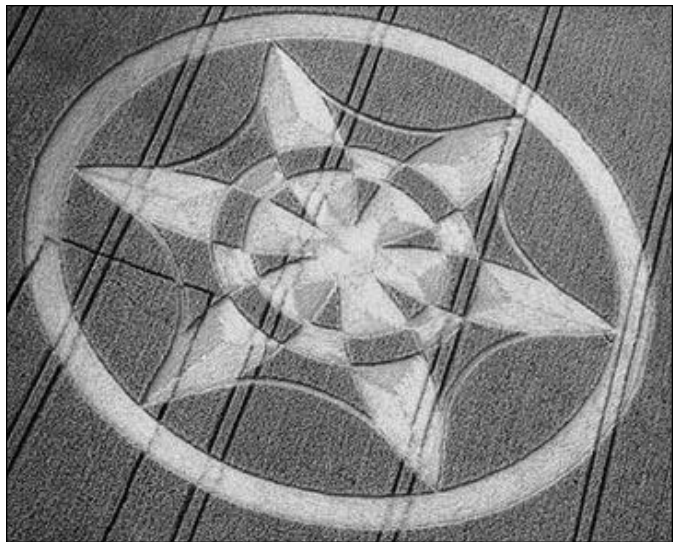
Broad Hinton, near Winterbourne Bassett, Wiltshire. Reported 24th July. Image: www.temporarytemples.co.uk © 2003



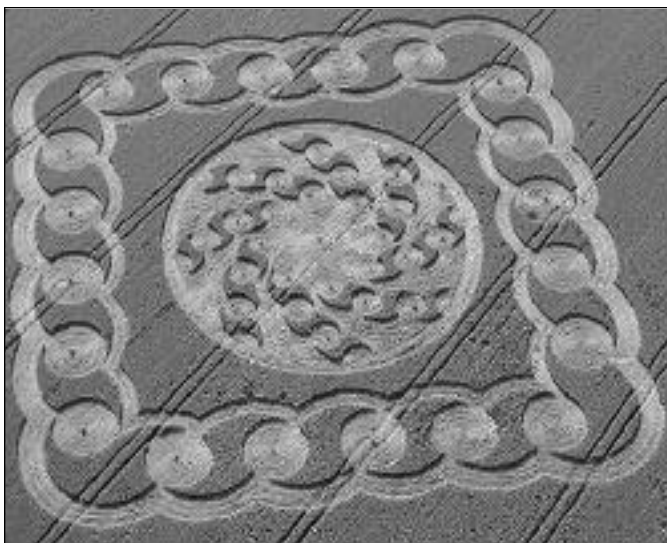
Tegdown Hill, Patcham, near Brighton, East Sussex. Reported 22nd July. Image: David Russell © 2003



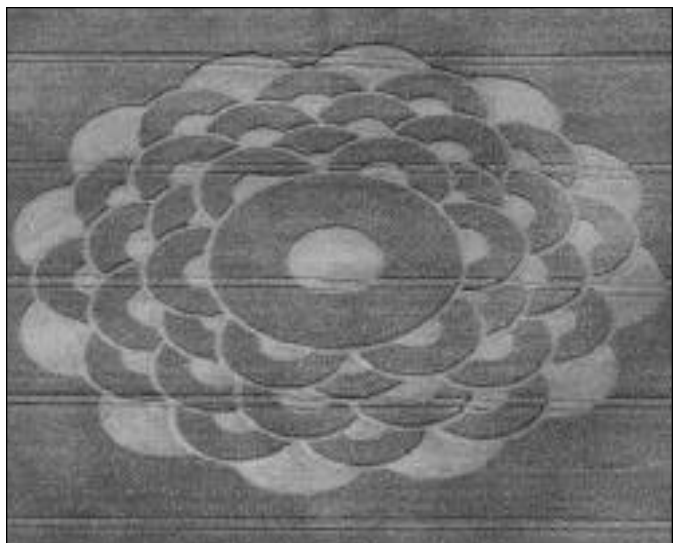
Milk Hill, near Alton Barnes, Wiltshire. Reported 17th June. Image: www.temporarytemples.co.uk © 2003



Kit's Coty, near Burham, Kent. Reported 26th July 2003. Image: Andrew King © 2003



South Field, near Alton Priors, Wiltshire. Reported 8th August. Image: John Dove © 2003



Thornborough Henge, near Ripon, North Yorkshire. Reported 21st June.

"molecule" pattern at Beckhampton on 10th August to serve as the last of the "biggies": a relatively simple but intriguing, massive spread of rings and crescents across a field.

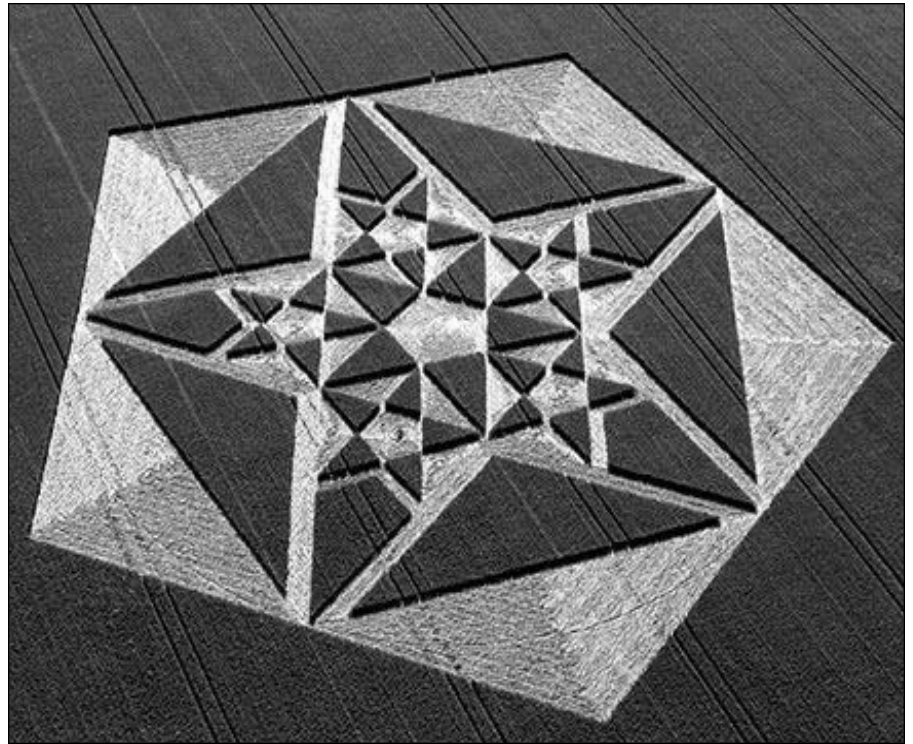
If there was slight disappointment across the UK, in the USA it was a different story. With Americans having been introduced to the phenomenon in a big way for the first time due to the *Signs* movie, there was far greater alertness to the appearance of new formations, with accompanying media excitement. The US is now in the throes of what the UK went through in the early 1990s: endless arguments and claims/counter-claims between sceptics and non-sceptics filling local newspapers and television screens, as seen particularly in Rockville, California, where a group of boys laid claim to a local pictogram.

UK researchers found it hard to stifle a kind smile at seeing people in another country going through what they have had to endure for so many years, knowing from experience that clear-cut answers to the debates now inflamed in the US will never come.

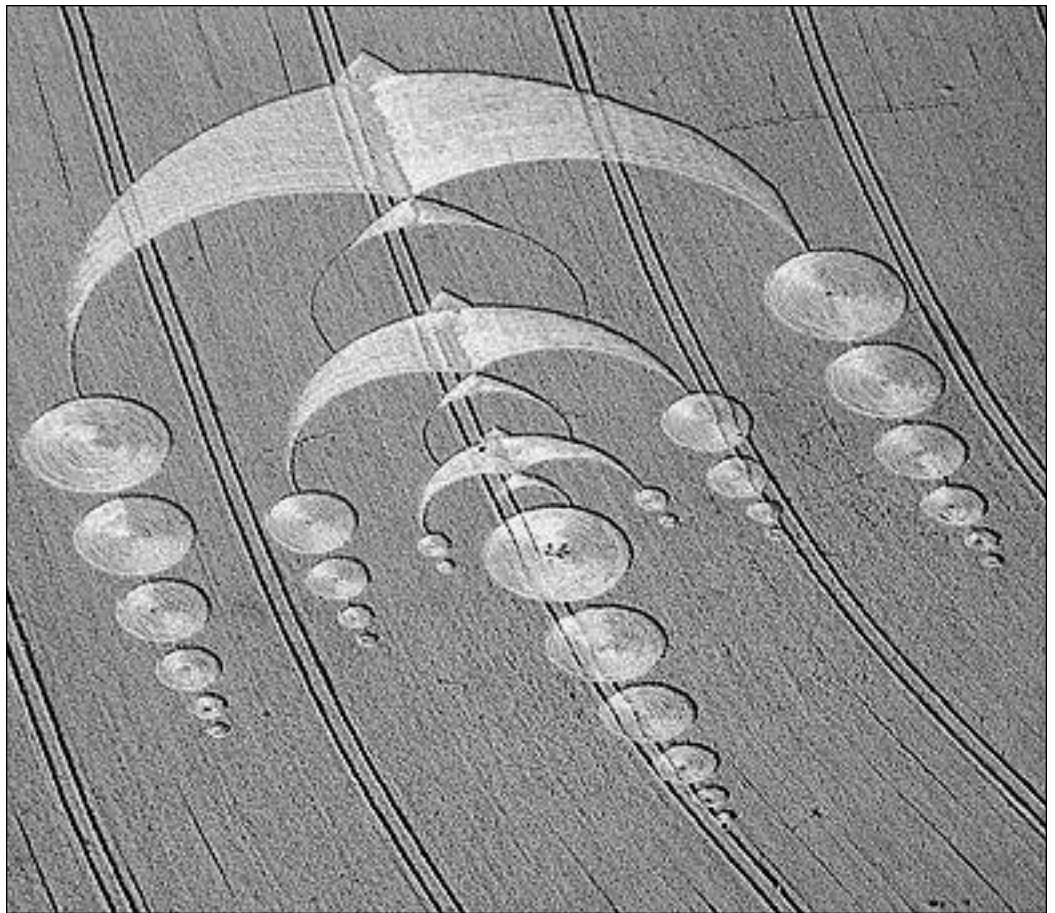
The US even had its first claimed eye-witness account of circles caught in the act of forming. According to the US TV station The Milwaukee Channel, a Wisconsin farmer says he watched formations appearing in his field during a thunderstorm. "It looked like a lake—the waves, the wind blowing—and then, all of a sudden, this dark hole appears, like a black hole. And then immediately, one to the right, then another to the centre of it."

Overall, the UK count of crop circles was notably down this year (with only around 75 recorded patterns), while the rest of the world was up in comparison (around 130 in total), with Germany, The Netherlands and Canada notching up some particularly fine formations. Germany, in particular, helped push the global count up with a staggering 58 recorded crop designs; if this curve continues, it will eventually challenge the UK as the leader in numbers.

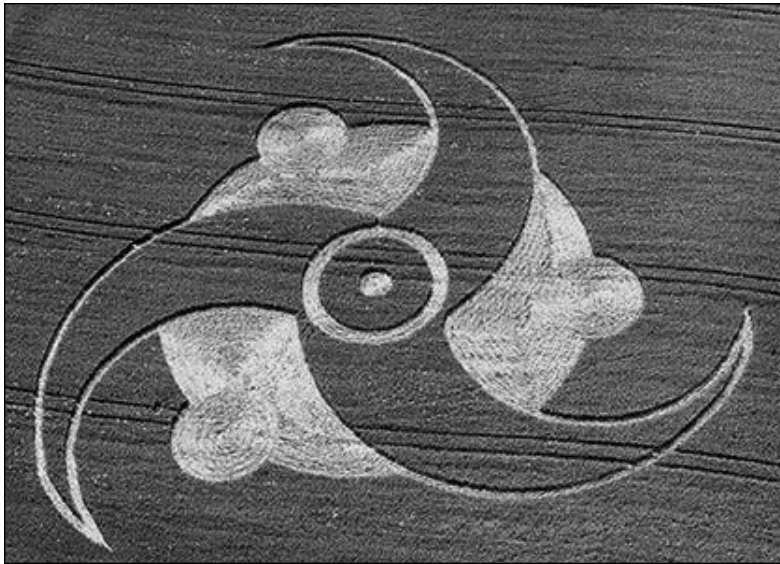
Meanwhile, Italy, previously almost a circle-free zone, suddenly produced 14



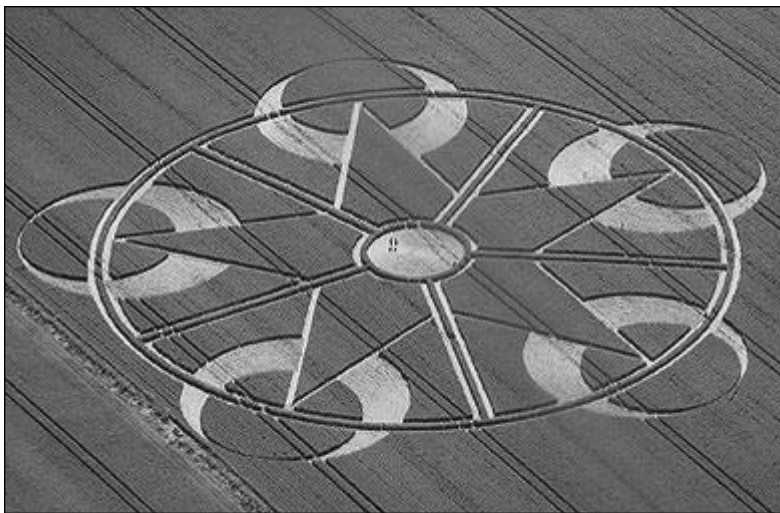
Green Street, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 6th July.
Image: www.temporarytemples.co.uk © 2003



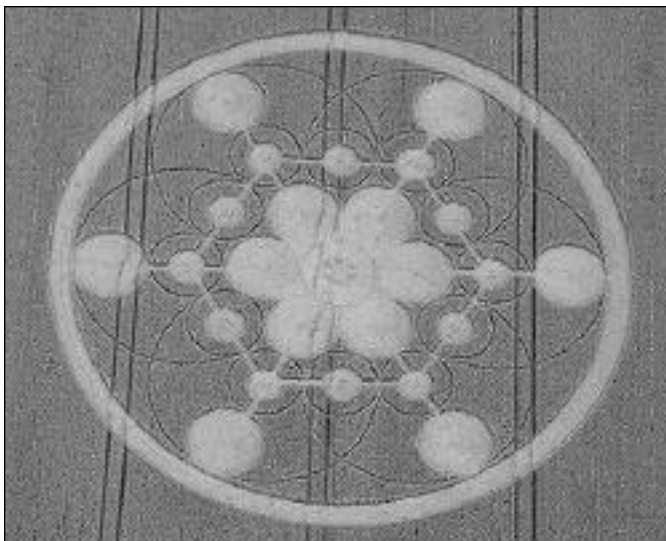
Walkers Hill, near Alton Barnes, Wiltshire. Reported 4th August.
Image: John Dove © 2003



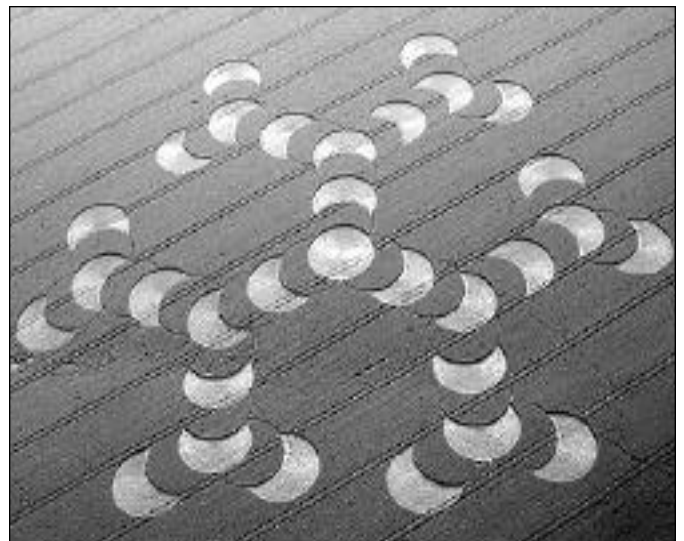
A34, near Litchfield, Hampshire. Reported 4th July.
Image: www.temporarytemples.co.uk © 2003



Avebury Trusloe, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 13th July.
Image: Nick Nicholson and the Crop Circle Connector © 2003



Scrope Wood, near Marlborough, Wiltshire. Reported 22nd July.
Image: Nick Nicholson and the Crop Circle Connector © 2003



North Down, near Beckhampton, Wiltshire. Reported 10th August.
Image: John Dove © 2003

events this year, following its first crop circle conference in 2002. Cynics claimed that newly inspired landscape artists were at work, but others argued that the almost psychic interactive quality of the enigma was in operation again, performing accordingly in a country waking up to the circles far more than ever before.

What a persistent and amazing phenomenon we have. After so many years of appearances, claims and theories, and with all the colourful personalities and intrigues surrounding them, the crop circles still remain a mystery, with neither the mystics nor the sceptics being able to explain their presence satisfactorily. It is the mystery, of course, that remains the phenomenon's greatest gift, leaving us all free to take whatever journey we choose with them. Doubtless, 2004 will be quite a different year again.

About the Author:

Andy Thomas is a leading crop circles researcher and the world's most prolific writer on the subject. He is best known for *Vital Signs: A Complete Guide to the Crop Circle Mystery*, described by many as the definitive word on the phenomenon. His most recent books, just published, are *Swirled Harvest: Views from the Crop Circle Frontline*, a collection of pieces on crop circles and related matters, and *A Oneness of Mind: The Power of Collective Thought and Signs of Our Times*, which transcribes some of Andy's extraordinary live presentations on other far-reaching matters. Information and online ordering details for all these books can be found at <http://www.vitalsignspublishing.co.uk>.

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www.temporarytemples.co.uk/